

# River's Edge Parent Handbook

2025-2026



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## **Welcome to River's Edge!**

We are excited to welcome you and your child to River's Edge! Our program is designed to provide children with opportunities for exploration, learning, and meaningful connections throughout the school year. Whether your child is discovering nature, engaging in hands-on activities, or building friendships, our goal is to create a safe and nurturing environment where every child can grow, learn, and thrive.

This handbook serves as a guide to help you and your family prepare for the school year. Inside, you'll find important information about schedules, policies, and expectations to ensure a positive and smooth experience for all participants.

It is the responsibility of parents and guardians to read and understand the contents of this handbook.

Thank you for choosing River's Edge. We look forward to a wonderful school year filled with discovery and growth!

## **Our Mission**

River's Edge Forest Play provides nature play experiences that inspire deeper connection with nature, self, and others so children can thrive.

Through outdoor exploration, imaginative play, and hands-on learning, we encourage children to build confidence, develop resilience, and cultivate a lifelong appreciation for the natural world. At River's Edge, we believe that childhood should be filled with wonder, curiosity, and the freedom to explore.

## **Camp Expectations**

At River's Edge, we strive to create a safe, respectful, and engaging environment for all campers. To ensure a positive experience, we ask that both children and parents/guardians understand and adhere to the following expectations:

### Camper Expectations

- **Respect for Nature:** Children should treat the natural environment with care by not harming plants or wildlife and by leaving no trace.
- **Respect for Others:** We encourage kindness, inclusion, and cooperation. Children should use kind words, listen to others, and keep their hands to themselves.
- **Respect for Self:** Children should come prepared each day with appropriate clothing, a packed lunch/snacks, and a refillable water bottle.
- **Safe Exploration:** While we encourage free play and risk-taking in a natural setting, children must follow safety guidelines and listen to staff instructions at all times.
- **Positive Attitude:** The forest is a place for adventure and growth. We encourage children to try new things, be open to challenges, and support their fellow campers.

## Parent/Guardian Expectations

- Timely Drop-Off and Pick-Up: Program hours are from 9:00 AM to 2:00 PM. Parents/guardians must adhere to these times and communicate promptly about any delays.
- Absence Notification: If a camper will be absent, parents/guardians must notify camp staff as soon as possible.
- Preparedness: Ensure that campers arrive with all necessary items, dressed appropriately for outdoor play and the weather conditions.
- Health & Safety: Do not send children to River's Edge if they are sick. Inform staff of any medical needs, allergies, or special considerations in advance.
- Open Communication: We encourage parents to share any concerns, questions, or feedback with camp staff.

By working together, we can create a safe and enriching experience where every child can learn, grow, and thrive in nature!

## **Communication**

At River's Edge Forest Play, we value clear and open communication with parents to ensure the best experience for your child. We use **Band**, a secure group messaging app, to send **daily updates and photos** at the **end of each program day**. This allows you to stay connected and see highlights of your child's day.

Any important updates, including **camp closures or schedule changes**, will also be communicated promptly through Band to ensure you receive timely information.

If you need to reach us, you can contact:

### **Primary Contact:**

Program Director: Ali

Email: [ali@riversedgeforestplay.com](mailto:ali@riversedgeforestplay.com)

Phone: 443-684-4253

### **Secondary Contact:**

Program Coordinator: Erin

Email: [erin@riversedgeforestplay.com](mailto:erin@riversedgeforestplay.com)

Phone: 610-223-2940

You may also message any of the guides directly through Band for quick communication during the camp day. Please note that guides **may not be able to respond quickly during camp hours**, as they do not have their phones out except for taking photos.

When reaching out, please include your name and your child's name so we can respond promptly and accurately.

We encourage parents to notify us of important information such as changes in pick-up plans or specific needs your child may have.

If you need to update your media release preferences at any time, please send us a written request.

## **What to Bring & What to Leave at Home**

To ensure a fun and comfortable camp experience, please review the following list of what your child should bring each day and what should stay at home.

### What to Bring

- **Lunch & Snacks:** We do not have access to refrigeration or microwaves, so please pack lunches that do not require heating or cooling. We strongly encourage parents to send extra snacks, as children will be burning more energy while playing outdoors and will likely be hungrier than usual.
- **Water Bottle:** A refillable water bottle is essential to keep your child hydrated throughout the day.
- **Weather-Appropriate Clothing:** Comfortable, weather-appropriate clothing is necessary, including layers for cooler mornings and a rain jacket if needed. Bathing suits are not permitted.
- **Closed-Toe Shoes:** Sturdy, closed-toe shoes (such as sneakers or hiking shoes) are required for safety during outdoor activities.
- **Sun Protection:** A hat and sunscreen are recommended. Please apply sunscreen before arriving at camp.
- **Bug Spray:** Apply bug spray before camp, you can send a labeled bottle for reapplication.
- **A Change of Clothes:** Campers may get wet or muddy.
- **Extra Shoes:** Campers may get wet or muddy, they will need shoes they are comfortable to wear walking back to the cars at the end of the day.
- **Backpack:** To carry personal belongings, lunch, and other necessities.
- **Emergency Medications:** If your child requires any emergency medications (such as an EpiPen, inhaler, or other life-saving medications), please send them with your child, along with the completed medication form.

### What to Leave at Home

- **Electronics:** Phones, tablets, smartwatches, and other electronic devices are not permitted at camp.
- **Toys & Personal Items:** Please keep toys, trading cards, and other personal items at home to prevent loss or damage.
- **Money & Valuables:** There is no need for money at camp, and we are not responsible for lost or stolen items.
- **Food That Requires Refrigeration or Microwaving:** As we do not have access to refrigeration or microwaves, please pack non-perishable or insulated food items.

- **Food that Attracts Bees:** To avoid attracting bees, please do not pack juice boxes or fruit in plastic-sealed cups. These items can be problematic in the outdoor environment and may draw unwanted attention from wildlife.
- **Messy Food:** Please avoid sending foods that cannot be resealed or are prone to becoming messy, such as yogurt or open containers of other liquids. These types of foods can create difficulties in managing lunchtime, especially in an outdoor setting, and may result in spills or messes that are hard to clean up and attract animals. We recommend packing foods that are easy to manage and don't require refrigeration or special handling.
- **Bathing Suits:** While we do enjoy playing in the creek, please do not send your child with a bathing suit. Bathing suits are not suitable for forest play and the variety of activities we do. If your child gets wet in the creek, they will have the opportunity to change into dry clothes afterward. We recommend packing extra clothes that are comfortable for active outdoor play and suitable for changing into after creek play.

All gear needs to be labeled with the child's name. A lost and found is available on site if your child is missing gear, clothing, or lunch containers

By ensuring your child comes prepared, we can help them have a fun, safe, and engaging experience at River's Edge Summer Camp!

## **Clothing Policy**

At River's Edge, we are dedicated to nurturing through nature play and believe in the Scandinavian philosophy: "There is no such thing as bad weather, only bad gear." Our camp operates outdoors, rain or shine, which means your child will be playing and exploring in all weather conditions, so appropriate clothing is crucial to their comfort and enjoyment.

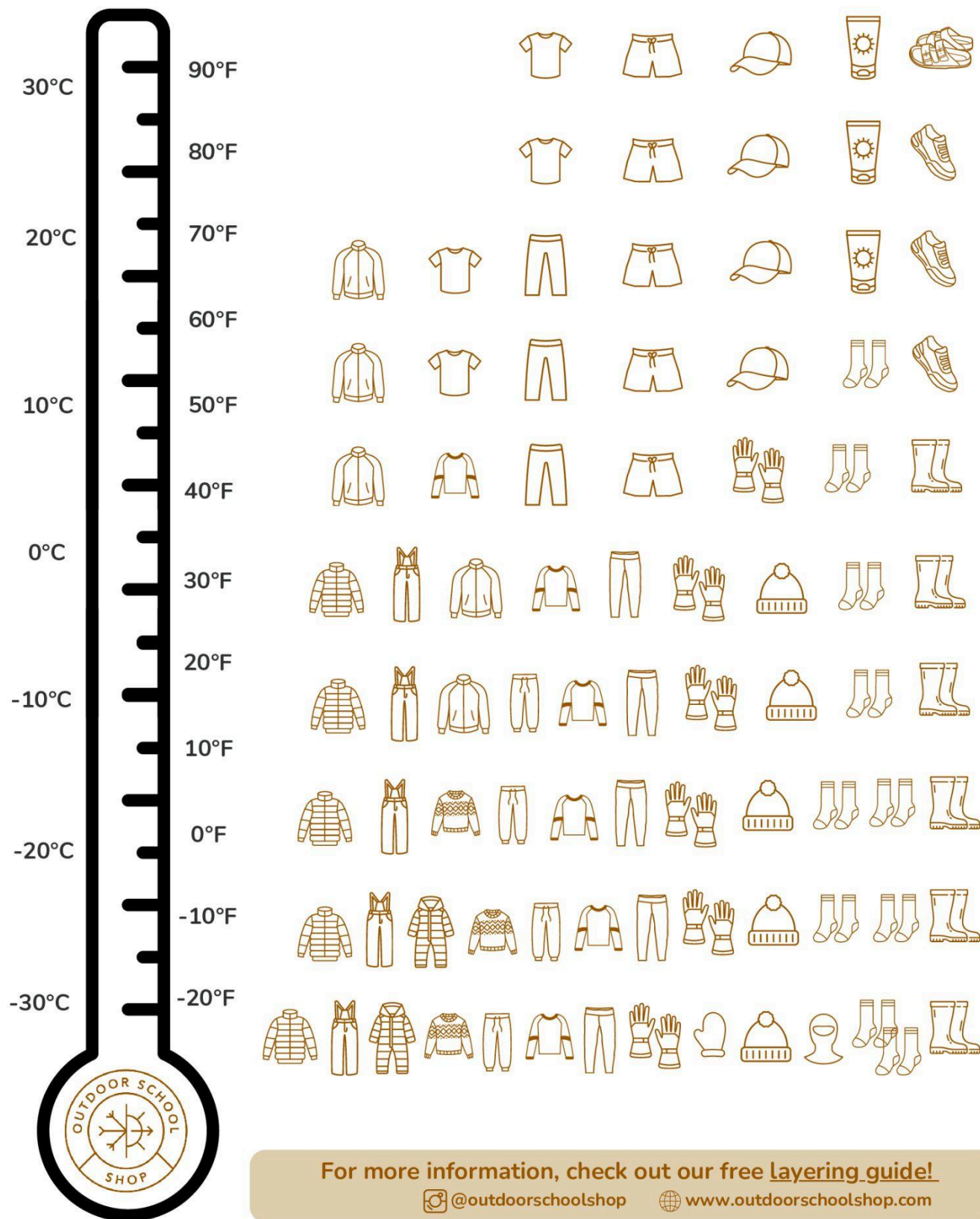
### Clothing & Gear

Appropriate clothing and gear are essential to ensure your child is comfortable and safe during outdoor activities. Please refer to the REFP Seasonal Clothing Guides for specific clothing recommendations for both the winter and summer seasons. As the weather changes, be sure to check the forecast and ensure your child is prepared for all weather conditions.

- **Rain Gear:** If it's raining, your child must wear appropriate rain gear, including a waterproof jacket, pants, and boots.
- **Weather-Appropriate Clothing:** Layers are recommended for cooler weather, and please send sunscreen, hats, and sunglasses for sunny days.
- **Footwear:** Closed-toe shoes or boots are necessary for safety and comfort.

Here's a helpful guide for layer recommendations based upon the temperature

## WHAT SHOULD I WEAR TODAY?



## Tents

We have tents available for children to change in privacy or for the provision of first aid, ensuring their comfort and safety if needed.

## **Water, Toileting, and Handwashing**

At River's Edge, we prioritize cleanliness and hygiene, especially when we are outdoors all day. Here's what you can expect regarding water, toileting, and handwashing:

### Water

- We will have water delivered to refill water bottles for the kids throughout the day.
- Clean water will be available in coolers at each site, along with soap for handwashing. Hand sanitizer will also be available if soap and water are not immediately accessible.
- We encourage all children to drink plenty of water to stay hydrated as they engage in outdoor activities.

### Toileting

- Campers will have access to a portable toilet located in a small tent at the site. Children are encouraged to use the restroom as needed throughout the day. If a child is comfortable and able, they may also be allowed to go behind trees in designated areas, with guidance from staff to ensure safety and privacy.

Please remind your child to let a staff member know if they need assistance or have any concerns.

### Handwashing

- We encourage children to wash their hands before and after eating and after using the toilet to maintain good hygiene. Clean water, soap, and hand sanitizer will be provided at each site to make handwashing as easy as possible.

### Leave No Trace

- We will teach your child the principles of "Leave No Trace" through the structure of our program. This means respecting nature by minimizing our impact and cleaning up after ourselves.



- Trash canisters will be limited, so we will encourage a pack-in/pack-out mentality, where each child is responsible for carrying out their own trash. Please help your child understand that they should bring everything back home with them, including any wrappers or containers.
- This year, we're also excited to share that we are raising worms and collecting compost from the children's lunches to support our garden. Children will be invited to separate out compostable food scraps during lunch, and we'll use those scraps to help feed our worms and enrich the soil for our plants. It's a great way for campers to see the cycle of food and nature in action!

## **Drop-Off and Pick-Up Procedures**

To ensure the safety and efficiency of drop-off and pick-up, please follow these procedures:

### Location

Upon entering the camp at 5030 Sudley Rd, West River, MD 20778, take an immediate right. This will lead you to the drop-off and pick-up loop. Please stay on the drive and form two lines as you approach.

### Drop-Off Procedure

1. Unbuckle your child from the car and help them with their backpacks, shoes, and gear.
2. Wait near your car for their guide to come pick them up. The camp staff will come to assist your child and take them to the camp area.
3. Once your child is with the guide, get inside your car then wait for guides to release the cars to leave. Having cars wait ensures that there are no moving vehicles where a child could be.

### Pick-Up Procedure

1. Stand outside your driver's door when you arrive to pick up your child.
2. The guide will bring your child to you.
3. Once your child is in the car, please buckle them up and then wait for guides to release the cars to leave. Having cars wait ensures that there are no moving vehicles where a child could be.

### Authorized Pick-Up

If a friend or relative will be picking up your child, please ensure that they are listed on the REFP Authorized Pick-Up Form. We ask that you call ahead to inform us of any changes in your pick-up or drop-off arrangements.

- Authorized Pick-Up Contacts will be asked to show a valid driver's license and sign in next to your child's name.

- If no adult arrives for pick-up, a staff member will attempt to contact the identified emergency contact for further instructions.

We appreciate your cooperation in following these procedures to help ensure the safety and smooth operation of our drop-off and pick-up process.

## **Cancellation and Early Dismissal Policy**

At River's Edge Summer Camp, the safety and well-being of your child are our top priority. We reserve the right to cancel camp or implement early dismissal due to severe weather conditions that could pose a risk to campers or staff. This includes, but is not limited to, storms, extreme heat, or other hazardous weather.

### Notification of Cancellations

If a camp day is canceled or if early dismissal is necessary, we will notify parents/guardians as soon as possible via **Band**.

In the case of early dismissal, please ensure that someone is available to pick up your child promptly.

We appreciate your understanding as we make weather-related decisions with the safety of all in mind.

### No Make-Ups

As we run a full calendar of programs throughout the year, we do not have the flexibility for make-up days. We appreciate your understanding that cancellations due to weather or other unforeseen circumstances will not be rescheduled.

We appreciate your understanding as we make weather-related decisions with the safety of all in mind.

## **Severe Weather Policy**

At River's Edge Forest Play, safety is our top priority. We closely monitor weather radar to stay aware of any potential severe weather conditions. In the event of severe storms or high winds, the following procedures will be in place:

- **Shelter:** If severe weather such as lightning or high winds occurs while children are playing in the woods, children and staff will take shelter at the site's covered barn in the welcome circle. This shelter will only be used during severe weather conditions to ensure the safety of all campers and staff.
- **Early Pick-Up:** If the severe weather persists and it is deemed unsafe to continue outdoor activities, we will contact parents for early pick-up.
- **Rain or Shine:** The REFP program will operate in rain or shine. We are prepared to continue with camp activities in light rain, so please ensure your child is dressed appropriately for

outdoor play.

We appreciate your understanding and cooperation as we prioritize the safety of all campers during unpredictable weather conditions.

## **Illness and Injury Policy**

At River's Edge Summer Camp, the health and safety of your child are our top priority. We are prepared to respond to illness and injury with care and professionalism. Below are the procedures we follow in the event of illness or injury while your child is at camp.

### Illness

If your child shows symptoms of illness, such as fever, vomiting, diarrhea, or excessive fatigue, we ask that they stay home to prevent the spread of illness to other campers and staff. If your child becomes ill during the camp day, we will contact you immediately to arrange for early pick-up.

If your child has a contagious illness (such as strep throat, the flu, etc.), they must be symptom-free and/or have a doctor's note before returning to camp.

### Injury

In the event of a minor injury (scrape, cut, bruise, etc.), children will receive basic first aid on-site from our First Aid-trained staff. In case of a serious injury or emergency, we will call 911 and, if necessary, your child will be transported to the hospital by emergency response personnel.

Please note that staff are not permitted to distribute any medicine to children, including over-the-counter or prescription medications. If your child requires medication during the camp day, please make arrangements to have a responsible adult administer it directly.

We will not transport children in any vehicle. Children can only exit the property in an approved pick-up person's car or in an emergency response vehicle. If your child's illness or injury prevents them from staying on-site, we will contact you or your emergency contact to arrange for immediate pick-up.

## **Bugs, Ticks, Poison Ivy, and Other Forest Hazards**

River's Edge Forest Play operates in a natural outdoor environment, which means that children may come into contact with a variety of natural elements. While these experiences are a valuable part of the outdoor adventure, we want to make parents aware of potential risks and how we handle them.

### Bugs & Insects

Children may encounter bugs such as mosquitoes, ants, flies, and other common insects in the forest. We encourage parents to apply bug repellent (preferably non-toxic or natural) before camp to

help protect against bites. Staff members will also take precautions to minimize bug exposure during camp activities.

Children will be allowed to reapply sunscreen and bug spray throughout the day, as long as they are a distance away from the other campers. This ensures that everyone's safety and comfort are maintained.

### Ticks

Ticks are a potential concern in wooded areas. While we take every measure to reduce the chances of tick bites, it is important to note that ticks can sometimes attach to the skin. We will educate children about the importance of checking for ticks at the end of the day. Please check your child for ticks when they come home from camp, especially around the scalp, armpits, and behind the ears. If a tick is found, remove it promptly and thoroughly. If you are concerned about tick-borne illnesses, please contact your healthcare provider.

### Poison Ivy, Oak, and Sumac

We take great care to educate children about poison ivy, poison oak, and poison sumac, and we make every effort to avoid these plants. However, accidents can happen. Poison ivy causes an itchy rash when touched, and children should be reminded to avoid touching any plants that they are unfamiliar with. If a child comes into contact with poison ivy, we will treat it with basic first aid and contact a parent if needed. Please be sure to check for poison ivy on your child's skin at the end of each camp day.

### Other Forest Hazards

In addition to bugs, ticks, and poison ivy, there are other natural hazards that can occur in the forest, such as:

- Thorns, sharp rocks, or sticks
- Allergic reactions to plants or insects
- Minor scrapes and bruises from outdoor play

Our staff is trained to handle minor injuries and treat them on-site. However, if an injury or reaction seems more serious, we will call a parent and/or emergency services.

## **Photography and Media Release**

At River's Edge Forest Play, we enjoy capturing the special moments of your child's outdoor adventures! Throughout the camp session, we may take photographs or videos of the children during activities. These images are used to showcase the fun and learning that takes place at camp, as well as to update parents about their child's experience.

### Photo Use and Updates:

- Each afternoon, we will post highlights from the day on **Band**, including photos and stories from the campers' activities. Only the group of parents registered for the program will have access to this private group, ensuring that all photos and updates are shared securely within our camp community. These updates are a great way to stay connected with your child's experiences and to catch a glimpse of the joy, learning, and adventure happening at camp each day.

Photo Release Consent: When registering, you completed a photo release consent form. By signing that form, you consent to the use of your child's photos and videos for:

- Daily Updates: Photos included in daily updates posted to **Band**.
- Promotional Purposes: Photos may also be used on our website, social media, or other promotional materials to help share the River's Edge experience.

If you wish to make changes to your photo release consent or if you would prefer your child's photos not to be included in the weekly updates or promotional materials, please notify us in writing. You can reach out via email to the Program Director, Ali, at [ali@riversedgeforestplay.com](mailto:ali@riversedgeforestplay.com), and we will update your preferences accordingly.